

Sen. Sam Brownback

Republican of Kansas



Senate History: Elected November 1996; won first full term in 1998 with 65 percent

Hometown: Topeka

Born: Sept. 12, 1956, Garnett, Kan.

Religion: Methodist

Family: Wife, Mary Brownback; five children

Education: Kansas State U., B.S. 1979; U. of Kansas, J.D. 1982

Career: Lawyer; professor; White House fellow; broadcaster

Political Highlights: Kansas secretary of Agriculture, 1986-93; U.S. House, 1995-96

Committees: Commerce, Science & Transportation; Foreign Relations; Judiciary; Joint Economic

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Sam Brownback knows about being in the right place at the right time. During his first four years

and six months as a senator, he labored behind the scenes as the chairman of the Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near East and South Asian Affairs, which was then quietly overseeing the United States' relations with a wide swath of countries from Egypt to the Central Asian states of the former Soviet Union. Since Sept. 11, the largely unpublicized expertise that he gained while wielding that gavel has helped to transform Brownback into an invaluable congressional resource as the United States wages war in Afghanistan and courts allies in bordering countries and the Muslim world.

During the fall, Brownback was the lead sponsor on two measures that could alter U.S. relations with the region. One allows President Bush to waive pro-democracy sanctions that the United States had imposed on Pakistan in 1999. (With Pakistan now a key U.S. ally, Bush was eager to waive the sanctions, which effectively limited U.S. aid to \$50 million per year.) After pushing the Senate to pass the legislation, Brownback worked the telephones to prod Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., and other GOP leaders to advance the legislation in spite of the opposition of some House members.

The other measure, part of the fiscal 2002 foreign operations appropriations package, would allow Bush to lift decade-old restrictions on U.S. government aid to Azerbaijan, a former Soviet state that has been helping the United States in the anti-terrorism campaign. Brownback pushed Secretary of State Colin L. Powell to lobby for lifting the ban, then worked to overcome objections from a key opponent, Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who had blocked a similar effort two years ago.

Ironically, these efforts came after Brownback's time as a top member on the Near East and South Asian panel had come to an end. He had to relinquish the chairmanship when the Democrats became the majority party in June. And, in a subsequent shuffle of subcommittee jurisdictions, the responsibility for oversight of Southern Asia was given to a different panel. (Afghanistan and Pakistan are among the countries that remain under the purview of the panel on which Brownback is the ranking Republican, however.)

The senator's interest in the region is not new. When India and Pakistan upset the nuclear balance by testing weapons in 1998, Brownback traveled to the region to talk to the leaders of the two countries. After the trip, he recommended that President Bill Clinton be allowed to waive for a year the mandated sanctions imposed on both countries because of the tests — a proposal approved by Congress and later turned into a permanent waiver. The next year, he won enactment of "Silk Road" legislation designed to improve U.S. relations and speed economic development in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Brownback's approach to the region reflects both pragmatic and ideological motivation. His efforts on behalf of the Silk Road were strongly backed by energy companies. And pro-Israel groups have lauded him for supporting the Iraqi opposition and attempting to block Iranian cooperation with Russia.

But his efforts to prevent the spread of radical Islam also reflect his strong religious beliefs, which have spurred him to the center of the action on issues ranging from Hollywood violence to international human rights abuses, usually taking the most conservative positions.

His emphasis on moral principles stands out in contrast to his predecessor, Majority Leader Bob Dole, who was more inclined to political pragmatism. Colleagues sometimes worry that Brownback goes too far, such as when he showed videotapes of graphic movie scenes in 2000 to denounce Hollywood violence. "There are more social workers than serial murderers in America. There are more pastors than prostitutes. But you'd never know it from TV," he said. "When we watch more and more violence, profanity and sleaze, we eventually grow more violent, profane and coarse."

MAINISTS

The senator scored political points when he urged the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to investigate whether the entertainment industry was marketing violent and sexually explicit movies and songs to young teenagers.

In 2000, the FTC charged film studios with marketing R-rated movies to children under 17. With Hollywood executives pledging to change their marketing strategies, Brownback vowed to keep the pressure on. If the studios continue targeting teens, he warned, "they will invite further probing by Congress," the Los Angeles Times reported.

But Brownback has voted against limiting violent TV programming to hours when children likely would not be watching. "I think that starts us down a path of content regulation and I disagree with that," he told the Los Angeles Times. "What I constantly push is the industry setting its own code of conduct."

Brownback says a 1995 bout with skin cancer served to focus him on the truly important things in life. He attends midweek Bible readings and prayer sessions, and has close personal and political connections to religious conservative activists. Long a principal Senate advocate of banning a procedure its opponents call "partial birth" abortion, in the past year he also has taken the lead among lawmakers who would like to outlaw the cloning of human beings.

Brownback has taken aim at the growing international sex trade, in which girls are enticed to leave their home and then forced into prostitution. Branding such sex trafficking "the new slavery," he won passage of legislation in the 106th giving expanded legal protections to girls in such situations, stiffening penalties on those who entice someone into sexual slavery and directing the State Department to monitor sex trafficking.

The senator has adopted children from China and Guatemala. But in the 106th, he came under criticism from some adoption advocates for opposing Senate ratification of the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, a treaty designed to impose standards on the often chaotic international adoption process. The treaty, Brownback contended, would create an unwieldy and costly adoption bureaucracy.

One of Brownback's lowest moments in Congress came in 1997 during Senate investigations into Democratic National Committee fundraising practices. Describing a bonus pay scheme that Democrats had arranged with fundraiser John Huang, Brownback mimicked a Chinese accent and said: "No raise money, no get bonus." A moment later, he added that he meant "no slight by my statement" — but it was too late. He came under sharp criticism from Asian-American groups, as well as from Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., who said: "The United States Senate is no place for racial stereotyping."

Brownback appears to have had politics in his blood since he was president of his eighth grade class. He also was student body president at Kansas State University, a national officer of the Future Farmers of America, the Kansas secretary of agriculture for six years and a White House fellow in the administration of President George Bush.

He entered the race for Kansas' 2nd District House seat in 1994 upon learning of the retirement of Democratic Rep. Jim Slattery. He easily defeated the state's two-term Democratic governor, John Carlin, whose lengthy public record and two divorces while in office gave Brownback plenty of targets.

When Dole resigned his Senate seat in 1996 to run for president, Brownback acted quickly — even though he was only partway through his first term in the House. Republican Gov. Bill Graves appointed Lt. Gov. Sheila Frahm to fill the seat until a special election could be held, but Brownback challenged the more-moderate Frahm by reaching out aggressively to business groups and social conservatives. He took the primary by 13 percentage points and won a tough general-election campaign against stockbroker Jill Docketing, part of a well-known Kansas political family, with 54 percent of the vote. In 1998, Brownback easily won election to a full term, besting Democratic state Sen. Paul Feleciano Jr.

— Miles A. Pomper

Word for Word

Brownback, in a Senate floor speech Sept. 14 on the need to form an international coalition to fight terrorism:

Many terrorists have networks that are headquartered throughout central Asia, South Asia and the Middle East. It is wise for us to go after these terrorist organizations. It is absolutely right for us to do so.

We need to build alliances with people throughout these regions, and they are available to us if we move wisely and successfully. The State Department has done a nice job thus far . . . [in] reaching out to many countries in that part of the world and saying: 'Look, it is time to stand up and be counted. You are either with us or against us, and we want to know what it is, and there will be consequences that will flow from that decision.'

It appears a number of these countries are standing up and saying: 'We are with you; this global scourge of terrorism hits us on a daily basis as it just hit you with such a devastating force on Sept. 11.'

I think it would be wise for us to look at this very seriously, that before we move forward, we build these alliances with a number of nations that are willing to stand up with us and be heard. That is very possible for us to do.

We need to look to nations such as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, nations that are not in the common lexicon perhaps of geography of the American student or maybe even the American political student. These are countries formed out of the fall of the Soviet Union, and they sit in direct proximity to Afghanistan, which has been the headquarters for some period of time of Osama bin Laden.

If these nations want to work with the United States, we ought to work with them. It requires us to look at them with a new set of eyes and say: 'OK, we put a lot of demands and pressures on you at different points, and now we have one singular focus, and that is to deal with terrorism; we want to work with you on that.' I think we will get their cooperation.